Bull trout

Salvelinus confluentus

STATUS

Threatened (Columbia River Basin and Klamath River populations- 63 FR 31647, June 10, 1998)
Threatened (Jarbidge population - 64 FR 17110, April 8, 1998)
Threatened (Coterminous U.S. - 64 FR 58910, November 1, 1999)

DESCRIPTION

Bull trout, a char species rather than true trout, need cold water to survive, so they are seldom found in waters where temperatures may be warmer than 59-64˚ Fahrenheit. Besides the coldest of water, bull trout require stable stream channels, clean spawning gravel, complex and diverse cover, and unblocked migration routes. Bull trout may be distinguished from brook trout by several characteristics. Spots never appear on the dorsal (back) fin, and the spots that rest on the fish's olive green to bronze back are pale yellow, orange or salmon-colored. (Lake trout also have pale yellow to gray spots on their sides, but their tails and dorsal fins have markings or spots.) The bull trout's tail is not deeply forked, as is the case with lake trout.

Bull trout may be resident or migratory. Resident bull trout spend their entire lives confined to the stream area close to where were spawned and reared, and they rarely exceed 12 inches in length. Migratory bull trout spawn in tributary streams and remain there from one to four years. They then move into lakes (adfluvial) or rivers (fluvial) where they grow to maturity. Because migratory bull trout have larger habitats and more food resources, they tend to be larger in size than the resident populations. Migratory bull trout are typically three to eight pounds, but they have the potential to reach 36" in length and up to 32 pounds. Bull trout spawn in the fall and their eggs remain deep in spawning gravels until spring emergence. Compared to other native salmonids, bull trout live a relatively long time and reach larger sizes. Bull trout eat insects until they are 12 to 16 inches long, then they switch to a diet of smaller fish and begin to grow more swiftly.

HISTORY

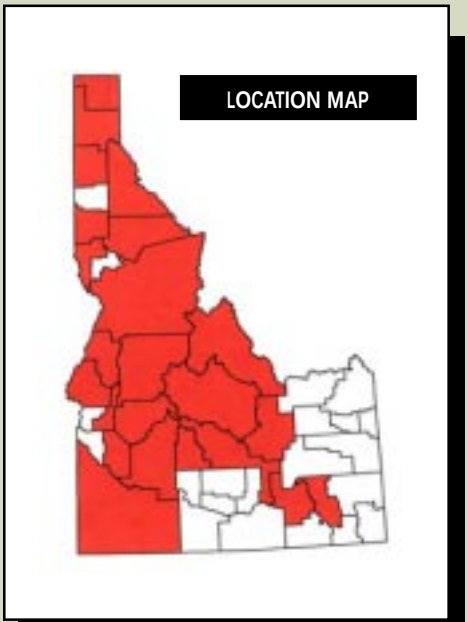
Bull trout are found in Idaho streams and lakes, except for those in the southeast portion of the state. At one time, these fish were found either throughout or in some of the major river systems of seven states and two provinces: Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia and Alberta, Canada.

DISTRIBUTION

Today, bull trout have been extirpated from California and many of the large rivers within its historic range. In Idaho, bull trout are locally common in some portions of its range, such as the Pend Oreille, Salmon and Boise river drainages. Much of the historic bull trout range, however, has been degraded by land use practices or blocked by dams.

WHAT HAS THREATENED THIS SPECIES?

Land management practices, such as logging, grazing, mining and road construction have degraded habitat through increased sedimentation in spawning gravels, higher stream temperatures, poor water quality. Dams have blocked migratory corridors and have eliminated river habitat needed for spawning. The introduction of non-native fish species, especially brook trout and lake trout, has increased hybridization, competition, and predation that have also negatively affected bull trout.



WHAT IS BEING DONE TO HELP RECOVER THIS SPECIES?

Efforts to help recover bull trout include restricting fishing, prohibiting non-native fish introduction, and protecting habitat from the effects of timber harvest and road construction. A statewide education effort is also underway to help with the problem of accidental harvest due to mis-identification of bull trout. A statewide Conservation Strategy was developed by state and federal agencies in 1996 to address habitat issues and other threats to bull trout. A Draft Recovery Plan for the coterminous listing of bull trout is being developed.

REFERENCES

USFWS.1998. Klamath River & Columbia River Bull Trout Population Segments: Status Summary and Supporting Documents Lists.